

**THE STRATEGY OF THE USE OF UNMANNED AERIAL
VEHICLES IN THE SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 2020 HOSTILITIES
IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH.
THE MILITARY AND INFORMATIONAL DIMENSION**

Abstract:	<p><i>The Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh Republic, the Armenian name) remains one of the main factors of instability in Transcaucasia. Although open hostilities between the Armenian and Azerbaijan armed forces were interrupted in May 1994, there have been constant incidents on the line of contact, the last being in 2016.</i></p> <p><i>In September-November 2020, the incidents escalated into an armed conflict between the parties with the use of conventional military equipment and modern military combat technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).</i></p> <p><i>The Armenian-Azerbaijan hostilities from September-November 2020 are distinguished, in particular, by the mass use by the Azerbaijan side of modern unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance and attack missions. This factor and strategy determined the successes of Azerbaijan during the conflict.</i></p> <p><i>Other important aspects of the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the September-November 2020 hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh were psychological operations and the dissemination of real-time information through the digital unmanned aerial vehicle system. Thus, drones have become the tool of the parties to obtain international support and raise awareness of the cause of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the digital environment.</i></p>
Keywords:	Nagorno-Karabakh; Armenia; Azerbaijan; conflict; unmanned aerial vehicles; digitization; information space
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The Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh Republic, the Armenian name) remains one of the main factors of instability in Transcaucasia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was one of the first territorial disputes in the post-Soviet space. With the disintegration of the Soviet Socialist Republic, two new independent states, Armenia and Azerbaijan, became involved in an interethnic military-political conflict. So far, there is no full diplomatic relations and economic ties between Yerevan and Baku, and the borders are closed¹. Although open hostilities between the Armenian and Azerbaijan armed forces were interrupted in May 1994², there have been constant incidents on the contact line, the largest of which was in April 2016³, and in September- November 2020 incidents escalated into an armed conflict between the parties with the use, in addition, of conventional military equipment and modern military combat technologies⁴. The hostilities of September-November 2020 are distinguished, in particular, by the mass use by the Azerbaijan side of modern unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance and attack. Another important aspect of the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the September-November 2020 hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh was psychological operations and the dissemination of real-time information through the digital unmanned aerial vehicle system.

The prologue to the September-November 2020 hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh was the confrontation in the Tavush region on the Armenian-Azerbaijan border in July 2020, where unmanned aerial vehicles were also used⁵. As a result of the hostilities that took place in July 2020 in the Tavush region, Armenian air defense units shot down 13 Azerbaijan unmanned aerial vehicles and a drone from the north-eastern part of Nagorno-Karabakh⁶. This led Azerbaijan to change its strategy for tackling unmanned aerial vehicles on the battlefield in the September-November 2020 hostilities.

Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles (produced by Turkey) equipped with laser-guided MAM bombs, as well as Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles Heron TP, Hermes 4507, Sky Striker and Harop, entered the service of the Azerbaijan

¹ Ali Abasov, Haroutiun Khachatrian, *The Karabakh conflict. Variants of settlement: concepts and reality*, Areat, Noyan Tapan, Baku-Yerevan, 2006, p. 18

² Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York University Press, New York, 2003, p. 238

³ Annyssa Bellal, *The War Report. Armed conflicts in 2016*, The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Geneva, 2017, p. 42

⁴ RIA, *Konflikt v Karabakhe — 2020: s pervogo dnya do poslednego peremiriya*, 11.11.2020, <https://ria.ru/20201111/karabakh-1584180304.html>, (17.03.2021)

⁵ Emil Sanamyan, *Armenian, Azerbaijani Forces Tussle for High Ground on Tavush Border*, „Institute of Armenian Studies”, 13.07.2020, <https://armenian.usc.edu/armenian-azerbaijani-forces-tussle-for-high-ground-on-tavush-border/>, (17.03.2021)

⁶ Hayastani Hanrapetut'yan Pashtpanut'yan Nakhhararut'yun, *Nerkayats'vel yen khots'vats anodach'u t'rrech'vogh sark'eri mnats'vordnery*, 21 hulis 2020, <https://www.mil.am/hy/news/8121>, (17.03.2021)

armed forces before the escalation of the conflict in September-November 2020. In addition, Aerostar drones, as well as Orbiter-1K and Orbiter-3 drones, are produced in Azerbaijan in a joint venture with Israel¹. The most used drone during the Karabakh conflict was the Bayraktar TB2 attack drone, manufactured by Turkey. Bayraktar TB2 is capable of operating under the control of an operator or independently and can be used for reconnaissance, observation or attack. Turkey used these unmanned aerial vehicles in Syria during Operation Spring Shield in February-March 2020² and in Libya³, where Bayraktar TB2 operated against Haftar's army.

According to the American Bard College Military Drone Research Center, the Azerbaijan army in 2019 was armed with Israeli reconnaissance and patrol drones Heron TP (2 units) and Hermes 4507 (10 units), as well as Sky Striker (100 units) and Harop (50 units). Two more long-range Hermes 900 drones were in the service of the Coast Guard⁴. Regarding the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones, before the escalation of the conflict there was no public information confirming the purchase and receipt of these drones by Azerbaijan. In June 2020, Azerbaijan's Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov reported that he hopes to receive these drones in the near future⁵. The lack of official information on the export and use of Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles is also linked to the use of third country technologies. In early October 2020, Canada suspended the export of technologies to Turkey for the production of drones due to suspicions that they are used in Karabakh⁶.

However, in 2020, Azerbaijan imported \$ 123 million worth of military equipment from Turkey. According to the report of the Turkish Exporters Assembly, before the Karabakh conflict, arms exports from Turkey to Azerbaijan increased to \$ 77.1 million by September 2020. In this context, it should be noted that in February 2020, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed "Military-financial

¹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2020*, Routledge, London, 2020, p. 185

² Faruk Zorlu, *Turkey's drone use puts forward new military doctrine*, "Anadolu Agency", 05.03.2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/science-technology/turkey-s-drone-use-puts-forward-new-military-doctrine/1755210>, (17.03.2021)

³ Samuel Ramani, *Turkey's Military Intervention in Libya: A Surprise Triumph for Erdogan*, „Royal United Services Institute Newsbrief“, Vol. 40, No. 5, June 2020, London, 2020, p. 3

⁴ Dan Gettinger, *The drone databook*, The center for the study of the drone at Bard College, New York, 2019, pp. 59-60

⁵ Daily Sabah, *Azerbaijan to purchase Turkish-manufactured combat drones*, 23.06.2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/azerbaijan-to-purchase-turkish-manufactured-combat-drones> (17.03.2021)

⁶ Levon Sevunts, *Canada suspends exports of military drone technology to Turkey*, "CBC", 05.10.2020, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-turkey-drone-azerbaijan-armenia-1.5751266_\(17.03.2021\)](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-turkey-drone-azerbaijan-armenia-1.5751266_(17.03.2021))

cooperation agreement”¹. The agreement provided a financial loan of 200 million Turkish pounds to Baku, which would allow Azerbaijan to buy weapons from Turkey. When signing the document, the experts mentioned that Azerbaijan prefers to buy a large number of unmanned aerial vehicles².

Armenia has not been involved in the purchase of unmanned aerial vehicles in recent years. At the same time, Yerevan itself produces ”Krunk”³ light class reconnaissance drones. However, these drones are not intended for attack missions. From the beginning of the conflict, the Armenian Armed Forces were armed with various air defense systems manufactured by the Soviets and Russians, while Nagorno-Karabakh airspace was covered only by the ”Osa” and ”Strela-10” air defense systems, produced during the USSR⁴. Both air defense systems are primarily focused on destroying fighter jets and helicopters and are not intended to combat unmanned aerial vehicle attacks. Earlier, in December 2019, Armenia purchased ”Tor” air defense systems from Russia⁵, which could be used effectively against drones, but they were not deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh. Karabakh's air defense system is much weaker than the Armenian one and consists of separate complexes that lack a continuous radar field. However, not all air defense systems in Nagorno-Karabakh were destroyed, and the Azerbaijan side was aware of this. For this reason, no action was taken by the attack aircraft on the battlefield in Karabakh during the conflict.

Hostilities began on 27 September 2020 with the use of missile strikes by the parties⁶. However, in the following period, the Azerbaijan armed forces, with the support of Turkish military specialists, deployed a massive group use of unmanned aerial vehicles, taking into account Turkey's experience of using drones in Syria and Libya⁷. It is no coincidence that, after gaining air superiority, Azerbaijan used its very limited manned aircraft, as air defense systems in the service of the Armenian armed forces posed another serious threat to Azerbaijan

¹ Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti, *Azərbaycan-Türkiyə sənədləri imzalanıb*, 25 fevral 2020, <https://president.az/articles/35963>, (17.03.2021)

² Roza Məmmədova, *44 günlük müharibə nəçəyə başa gəldi?*, „Aciq Azərbaycan”, 16.01.2021, <http://openazerbaijan.org/topics/ara-d-rma/44-gunluk-muharib-nec-y-ba-a-g-ldi/>, (17.03.2021)

³ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2017*, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 199

⁴ Alexandr A. Khramchikhin, *Forpost s voprosami*, „Voyenno-promyshlennyy kur'yer”, Nr. 9 (624), 09.03.2016, Moskva, 2016

⁵ TASS, *Armeniya priobrela rossiyskiye ZRK "Tor-M2KM"*, 21.12.2019, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7396249>, (18.03.2021)

⁶ Rafael' Fakhrutdinov, *Eskalatsiya v Karabakhe: podbity tanki, vertolety i sredstva PVO*, 27.09.2020, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/09/27/13270099.shtml>, (18.03.2021)

⁷ RBC, *V Turtsii zayavili Shoygu o nevozmozhnosti Azerbaydzhana «zhdat' yeshche 30 let»*, 12.10.2020, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/12/10/2020/5f8467b89a794706c476e9b9>, (18.03.2021)

aircraft. However, Armenia has proved completely unprepared for a war with the massive use of drones, a tactic practiced by Turkey in Syria and Libya.

Since the first days of hostilities, the Karabakh army has lost dozens of air defenses, most of them obsolete. Azerbaijan's massive use of Bayraktar TB2 drones, along with Sky Striker, Harop and Orbiter drones, led to the destruction of a significant part of the "Osa" and "Strela-10" air defense systems in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the early days of hostilities, a prepared attack was launched against the positions of these air defense systems. Up to 80% of Nagorno-Karabakh's air defense systems were destroyed: 6 "Osa" systems and 3 "Strela-10" air defense systems. The loss among the drones was 4 units¹. Thus, due to the massive and surprising use of drones, ensuring the exchange of 2.25 air defense systems for 1 unmanned aerial vehicle, the conquest of air superiority made it possible for Azerbaijan with the help of drones to continuously and freely attack Armenian motorized armed units, causing significant losses among them before the infantry entered the battle. This greatly facilitated the Azerbaijan army's offensive and made it possible to achieve significant tactical successes. After solving the problem of air defense installations, the drones switched to tanks, combat vehicles, artillery and trucks carrying ammunition.

A series of direct attacks on the positions of Armenian infantry depots also followed². In addition, throughout the war, unmanned aerial vehicles aimed their artillery at infantry equipment and groups. One of the episodes of a combined attack, directly from drones and their missile launchers took place during a major offensive by the Armenian armed forces on the front line in the directions of Agdere-Agdam and Fizuli-Hadrut³. As a result of heavy losses due to airstrikes, the southern Karabakh front was breached, after which (in early November) the Azerbaijan infantry, advancing through the mountainous terrain, which Armenia considered a "natural fortress", reached the vital regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, the cities of Shusha and Stepanakert⁴.

¹ Iliya Afonin, Sergey Makarenko, Sergey Petrov, Alexandr Privalov, *Analysis of combat experience as groups of unmanned aerial vehicles are used to defeat anti-aircraft missile means of the air defense system in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh war*, „Systems of Control, Communication and Security”, Nr. 4, 2020, Sankt-Petersburg, 2020, p. 178

² TASS, *Minoborony Armenii utverzhdayet, chto Turtsiya korrektiruyet udary BPLA Azerbaydzhana po Karabakhu*, 11.10.2020, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/9686347>, (18.03.2021)

³ Azərbaycan Respublikası Müdafiə Nazirliyi, *Düşmənin bütün cəbhə boyu fəaliyyətinin qarşısı alınıb*, 13 oktyabr 2020, <https://mod.gov.az/az/news/dusmenin-butun-cebhe-boyu-fealiyyetinin-qarsisi-alinib-32948.html>, (18.03.2021)

⁴ Hayastani Hanrapetut'yan Pashtpanut'yan Nakhararut'yun, *Mamuli haghordagrut'yun*, 6 noyember, 2020, <https://www.mil.am/hy/news/8660>, (18.03.2021)

Armenia's air defense systems such as the S-300PS and S-300PT¹, not intended to fight against the unmanned aerial vehicles, have not been used effectively to defend the airspace of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, as a result of a well-planned operation², Azerbaijan drones destroyed 6 S-300PS anti-aircraft missile systems, according to the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan³. Unmanned aerial vehicles have been successful in this direction due to the fact that in the first stage of the military conflict, Azerbaijan used unmanned An-2 aircraft to identify the location of Armenian air defense systems. The planes were shot down, but this made it possible to reveal the location of both the S-300PS air defense system and the "Osa" and "Strela-10" short-range air defense systems that cover it. After the destruction of the short-range air defense system, the S-300PS air defense system remained uncovered and was attacked by unmanned aerial vehicles Harop.

Following the destruction of the main forces of the Nagorno-Karabakh air defense system, the Armenian side failed to quickly replenish its resources to the detriment of the new air defense systems. Yerevan got into a situation where Baku, after gaining air superiority, began to use it to gain a strategic advantage in the war. This makes an increase in the number of casualties and an increase in problems in defending ground forces from massive drone strikes in the air inevitable. The emergency acquisitions of MANPADS (Man-portable air-defense systems) by the Armenian side have solved only part of the systemic problem to combat the attacks of unmanned aerial vehicles. However, during hostilities, Armenian air defense forces⁴ and Karabakh military units managed to repel some attacks by Azerbaijan unmanned aerial vehicles⁵.

This allows us to conclude that Baku, before the escalation of hostilities, focused its war strategy on the mass use of unmanned aerial vehicles. In the first stage, unmanned aerial vehicles were used to recognize the strategic positions of the enemy. In terms of a game of chess, the drones performed the function of a gambit (sacrifice pawn). In the launch phase of the first attack, drones were used to open and destroy air defense systems, and later to destroy manned aircraft and helicopters on the ground and in the air. After gaining air superiority, unmanned

¹ Fuad Shahbazov, *Tactical Reasons Behind Military Breakthrough in Karabakh Conflict*, „The Jameston Foundation”, 03.11.2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-reasons-behind-military-breakthrough-in-karabakh-conflict/>, (18.03.2021)

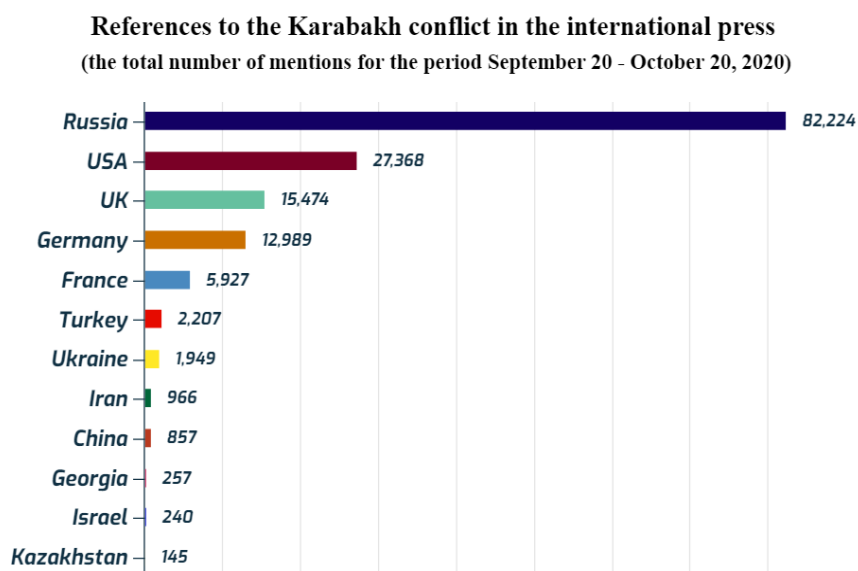
² Azərbaycan Respublikası Müdafiə Nazirliyi, *Düşmənin S-300 zenit-raket kompleksinin məhv edilməsi*, 17 oktyabr 2020, <https://mod.gov.az/news/dusmenin-s-300-zenit-raket-kompleksinin-mehv-edilmesi-video-33030.html>, (18.03.2021)

³ Interfax Azerbaidjan, *VS Azerbaydzhana unichtozhili 6 ZRK S-300 VS Armenii – Aliyev*, 25.10.2020, <http://interfax.az/view/817437> (18.03.2021)

⁴ TASS, *V Yerevane soobshchili ob unichtozhenii v nebe nad stranoy dvukh bespilotnikov VS Azerbaydzhana*, 17.10.2020, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/9743291>, (19.03.2021)

⁵ Arts'akhi Hanrapetut'yan Pashtpanut'yan Nakhararut'yun Pashtonakan kayk', *Haghordagrut 'yun*, 29 hoktemberi, 2020, <https://nkrmil.am/news/view/3090>, (19.03.2021)

aerial vehicles had the role of destroying Armenian tanks, armored vehicles, ground forces and critical state military infrastructure. At this stage, the drones acted as air support for the Azeri ground forces. Thus, the Armenian armed forces considered unmanned aerial vehicles as a separate system that could only be used in certain elements of the conflict, while Azerbaijan used drones as a major force in the theater of military operations. Although hostilities took place in July 2020 in the Tavush region of the Armenian-Azerbaijan border, Armenian air defense units shot down 13 unmanned Azerbaijan aircraft and a drone in the northeastern part of Nagorno-Karabakh¹, however, in the hostilities of September-November 2020, the Armenian forces proved to be ineffective in the face of massive attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles. The main difference in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the September-November hostilities in Karabakh was the use of drones with weapons in the attack missions, which Baku previously used only for patrol missions, for example the escalation of the situation in 2016. In many ways, this factor and strategy has determined Azerbaijan's success during the conflict.



**Fig.1 Mentions of the Karabakh conflict in the international press
(September 20 - October 20, 2020)²**

¹ Hayastani Hanrapetut'yan Pashtpanut'yan Nakhararut'yun, *Nerkayats'vel yen khots'vats anodach'u t'rrch'vogh sark'eri mnats'vordnery*, 21 hulusi 2020, <https://www.mil.am/hy/news/8121>, (19.03.2021)

² RIA, *Opublikovano issledovaniye ob osveshchenii v SMI situatsii v Karabakhe*, 28.10.2020, <https://ria.ru/20201028/karabakh-1581906510.html>, (20.03.2021)

Other important aspects of the use of drones in the September-November 2020 hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh were psychological operations and the dissemination of real-time information through video and photo transmitters located in the digital system of unmanned aerial vehicles. Thus, the parties published daily news and informational materials in the media. Both sides have tried to document the course of unmanned aerial vehicle fighting as a way to accuse their opponent of war crimes. Thus, competing political discourses, interpretations of events and information in the digital environment began to gain momentum between the parties. This has catalyzed the spread on digital channel networks, interactive dialogue sites and in the international media of special campaigns to inform and expand political discussions on Armenian-Azerbaijan hostilities.

The American company from New York, which provides information services from the digital environment, Lexis Nexis carried out a study on the distribution of information in the media about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (Fig. 1)¹. Analysts analyzed reports in the international press about the Karabakh conflict from September 20 to October 20, 2020. The most active was written about the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in Russia, over 82 thousand messages per month, in second place is the United States, about 27 thousand messages per month. European countries occupy the following places: Great Britain (about 15 thousand), Germany (about 12,900) and France (about 6 thousand). In Turkey, the conflict was mentioned at about 2.2 thousand messages per month².

Russia, through the prism of digital space, has demonstrated a balanced equidistant approach to the parties in the conflict. This is due to the fact that the Kremlin over the years has not tried to resolve the issue around Karabakh, on the contrary, the "suspended state" of this issue was in the interests of Moscow in the region. At the same time, the Russian Federation is an ally of Armenia within the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty (CSTO) and has bilateral security agreements with Yerevan³. Moreover, Russia, together with the United States and France, is the co-chair of the OSCE Group in Minsk, which has a mission to resolve the conflict.

In the US media, which together with the Russian Federation and France are co-chairs of the OSCE Group in Minsk, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, according to the data presented above, was not a priority in terms of media coverage. This is explained by the fact that the subject of the US presidential

¹ RIA, *Opublikovano issledovaniye ob osveshchenii v SMI situatsii v Karabakhe*, 28.10.2020, <https://ria.ru/20201028/karabakh-1581906510.html>, (20.03.2021)

² *Ibidem*

³ *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Soglasheniye mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Respublikoy Armeniya ob Ob"yedinennoy gruppirovke voysk (sil) Vooruzhennykh Sil Respubliki Armeniya i Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 30.11.2016, https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/2_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/page-1/51760, (20.03.2021)

election and the pandemic were the themes of domination in the American press. The US position has been restricted. From the first days of the conflict, Washington called on the parties to end hostilities and resume peace talks¹. At the same time, positive publications for Armenia (8%) often² appeared in the American media, while positive publications for Azerbaijan practically did not exist.

The British and German media took a neutral position. However, the French media took a pro-Armenian position. 42% of the media reports analyzed by Lexis Nexis contained criticism of Azerbaijan's actions, 58% of publications can be classified as neutral. Moreover, at the end of November 2020³, the French Senate voted a resolution in recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh, but the presidential majority opposed the vote⁴. This pro-Armenian position of France is a strategy of Paris in its geopolitical confrontation with Ankara.

The Turkish media supported the Azerbaijan side of the conflict. Criticism of Armenia is contained in 46% of messages, and support for Azerbaijan is expressed in 47% of publications⁵.

Iran, the only state in the world that borders all three sides of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh) has taken a neutral position. It should be noted that the Iranian Government has declared its readiness to mediate the settlement of the military conflict in Karabakh⁶. First of all, Iran was concerned about the spread of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Iranian society, as the Azerbaijan minority is one of the most influential in Iran.

The Israeli press wrote that their country cannot be a neutral observer in the Karabakh conflict, because Israel is a strategic ally of Azerbaijan. This can be mentioned in the context of the export of unmanned aerial vehicles to Azerbaijan and in the Israeli-Azerbaijan collaboration in the production of drones. We could also draw attention to the fact that, although Israel has ties to both Yerevan and Baku, Israel still imports up to 40% of its oil from Azerbaijan, which makes ties

¹ OSCE, *Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group*, 27.09.2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/465018>, (20.03.2021)

² Kommersant, *Zarubezhnyye SMI: Pochemu Armeniya i Azerbaydzhan pereshli na voyennoye polozheniye?*, 28.09.2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4510142>, (20.03.2021)

³ RIA, *Opublikovano issledovaniye ob osveshchenii v SMI situatsii v Karabakhe*, 28.10.2020, <https://ria.ru/20201028/karabakh-1581906510.html>, (20.03.2021)

⁴ Public Sénat, *Le Sénat vote en faveur de la reconnaissance du Haut-Karabagh*, 25.11.2020, <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/parlementaire/le-senat-vote-en-faveur-de-la-reconnaissance-du-haut-karabagh-185812>, (20.03.2021)

⁵ RIA, *Opublikovano issledovaniye ob osveshchenii v SMI situatsii v Karabakhe*, 28.10.2020, <https://ria.ru/20201028/karabakh-1581906510.html>, (20.03.2021)

⁶ Independent, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia and Azerbaijan clashes resume as Iran promises peace plan*, 06.10.2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/nagorno-karabakh-armenia-azerbaijan-iran-peace-plan-b819259.html>, (20.03.2021)

with this country very important¹. Thus, criticism of Armenia was more frequent in the Israeli media - 34%².

In the post-Soviet space, most publications were neutral. Kazakhstan has consistently advocated a peaceful settlement. The Georgian media criticized both Armenia and Azerbaijan alike (8% each). Ukrainian media actively drew parallels between Karabakh and Donbass.

In this context, unmanned aerial vehicles, through the prism of digital intelligence, spread the image of the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in the global arena, which later through the international media learned different approaches and interpretations. These in turn led to the formation of digital campaigns, posts on social networks based on arguments and the transmission of information items from the battlefield, thus creating media content on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This media content in the international media and social networks have become an effective tool for promoting the parties' foreign policy and a way to accuse their opponent of war crimes. In this context, online platforms have also become a battleground for Armenians and Azeri's who want to gain international support and raise awareness of their cause. Thus, the Azerbaijan society united within the digital platform "Karabakh is Azerbaijan", where information was distributed from Nagorno-Karabakh about the situation on the front. The hashtags #KarabakhisAzerbaijan, #Karabakh, #StopArmenianAgression, #StopArmenianOccupation were used within the platform, and in general, the publications were distributed approximately 100,000 times³. The Azerbaijan label #PrayForGanja has become a global trend, with 1 million 240 thousand retweets, within the Twitter platform. For example, in Germany, on October 17, 2020, the hashtag #PrayForGanja became number 1 on the Twitter platform⁴.

The Armenian side in turn focused its activity on social networks, being supported by active users from outside the region (diaspora). The #Armenia label received over 20 million distributions on Facebook between September and November 2020. Labels such as #WeWillWin and #StopAzerbaijanAggression also had massive support on digital platforms⁵.

¹ OEC, *Israel – Azerbaijan*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/isr/partner/aze>, (20.03.2021)

² Jewish Insider, *Nagorno-Karabakh conflict highlights Israel's strategic role in region*, 12.11.2020, <https://jewishinsider.com/2020/11/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-israel/>, (20.03.2021)

³ Report, *Azərbaycanlı gənclər #KarabakhisAzerbaijan, #StopArmenianAgression həştəqlərini dünya trendi edib*, 17 İyul, 2020, <https://report.az/diaspora/azerbaycanli-gencler-karabakhisazerbaijan-stoparmenianagression-hesteqlerini-dunya-trendi-edib/>, (21.03.2021)

⁴ Getdaytrends, *#PrayForGanja*, <https://getdaytrends.com/germany/trend/%23PrayForGanja/>, (21.03.2021)

⁵ BBC, *Nagorno-Karabakh: The Armenian-Azeri 'information wars'*, 26.10.2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54614392#16164416430082&>, (21.03.2021)

In conclusion, we can mention that in an era of increased attention to information technology, unmanned aerial vehicles have become an ideal tool for carrying out conventional wars. The Nagorno-Karabakh war of September-November 2020 is the third armed conflict after Syria and Libya, in which unmanned aerial vehicles were widely used. Moreover, they carried out a significant number of offensive operations, carried out reconnaissance and attack missions, and supported ground forces on the battlefield. Given the mountainous geographical area and the strategic deployment of short-range air defense forces, both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which pose additional risks to the use of aviation, have resulted in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles considerable success. Baku used weapons drones in reconnaissance, observation and attack missions. In many ways, this factor led to Azerbaijan's success during the September-November 2020 hostilities.

Also, unmanned aerial vehicles, through digital technologies assembled in its construction, have spread the image of Armenian-Azerbaijan hostilities globally. These informational materials, in turn, were synthesized and experienced different approaches and interpretations by the international media. Thus, digital campaigns were formed, posts on social networks based on the transmission of information objects on the battlefield by unmanned aerial vehicles, thus creating a media content on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This media content in the international press and social networks has become an effective tool for promoting the parties' foreign policy and a way to accuse their opponent of war crimes. In this context, online platforms have also become a battleground, aimed at gaining international support and raising awareness of the cause of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the digital environment.

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